Tongue River (221 River Miles)

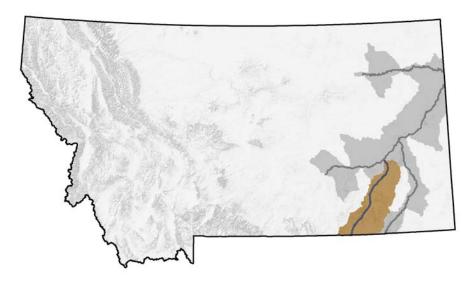


Figure 28. Tongue River Focus Area

The headwaters of the Tongue River rise in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. From these sources the river flows northeast to its confluence with the Yellowstone River at Miles City. A major spawning tributary for native fishes found in the Yellowstone system, the Tongue River provides spawning and nursery habitat for sauger, shovelnose sturgeon, channel catfish, and many cyprinid minnow species. The 3,500-acre Tongue River Dam controls the river's flow in Montana. Above the reservoir, the river meanders through a broad open valley. Here its main features are turbid water, slow velocity gravel and mud bottoms, and warm water temperatures. Downstream from the dam, the river flows for 10 miles through a narrow, restrictive canyon with increasing gradient and accompanying cooler water temperatures and gravel bottoms. The Tongue River again becomes a slow, meandering valley stream for its last 179 miles.

Associated Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Tier	Acres	Miles
Lowland Lakes	III	665	
Lowland Reservoirs	III	2,176	
Mountain Lakes	III	54	
Prairie Rivers	II		221
Prairie Streams	I		4,843

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 49 aquatic species that are found within the Tongue River Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 32.

Fish: Paddlefish, Sturgeon Chub, Blue Sucker, Burbot, and Sauger

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies	
Dewatering as a result of water	Work with public and private land	
diversion	owners to improve efficiency of water	
	use in order to maximize water return	
	Protect instream flow reservations	
Water chemistry problems due to	Support cooperative efforts to minimize	
irrigation return water and the	impacts of return water due to	
discharge of wastewater from coal bed	sedimentation, increased salinity and	
methane operations, and other sources	temperature alteration	
	Careful study waters entering the Tongue River as a result of coal bed methane development in both Montana	
	and Wyoming	
Entrainment of juvenile and adult fishes	Screening or modification of irrigation	
by irrigation diversions or other water	diversions or other water intakes in a	
intakes	manner that prevents entrainment of fishes	
Riparian vegetation effected by range and forest management practices and streamside residential development (such activities destabilize streambanks, increase sediment inputs, reduced shading, and remove woody debris)	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas	
Modification and degradation of stream	Restoration of stream channels or	
channels caused by various	streambanks to a condition that	
construction or land management practices	simulates their natural form and function	
	Modification of riparian management	
	practices such that riparian vegetation	
	is allowed to recover	
	Develop statewide riparian best	
	management principles	

Alterations of the quantity or timing of stream flows, causing dewatering or unnatural flow fluctuations that diminish the quantity or quality of essential habitats	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats, simulate the natural hydrograph and also protect instream flows
Culverts, dams, irrigation diversions, and other instream barriers that fully or partially impede fish movement and reduce connectivity of habitat	Removal or modification of barriers in a manner that restores fish passage
Loss of species (mountain whitefish and mountain sucker) below Tongue River Dam due to de-watering and drought	Support cooperative efforts to increase water flow and reduce barriers to migration specifically affecting these species